

¡viva venezuela!

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Chávez Wins Record Victory

Also inside: ■ Eyewitness Accounts From the Election
■ Record Support for Venezuela in Britain

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**Venezuela
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Campaign**



Chávez's re-election is a huge boost for social progress



“Chávez's margin of victory of 11% was enormous. To put it into context, only two general election victories in Britain since 1945 have had a wider winning margin”

Hugo Chávez scored a massive win in October, securing 55% of the vote to be re-elected as Venezuela's President and defeat the candidate of the right wing coalition, Henrique Capriles Radonski.

At 11% Chávez's margin of victory was enormous. To put it into context only two general election victories in Britain since 1945 have had a wider winning margin. Amazingly, Chávez added 800,000 votes to his previous total - despite the world economic crisis having hit Venezuela since then. Few, if any, other leaders around the world have done this.

Once again the vibrancy of Venezuela's democracy was clear. The turnout of 80% was the highest in the country's history, surpassing even the years when voting was legally compulsory!

Such a convincing result very likely persuaded some of the right-wing coalition to abandon their plans of not recognising the result that were lined up ahead of the election. Previously, prominent members of the right-wing coalition had said that they would release their own results ahead of the official ones on election day, strongly suggesting that any result other than an opposition victory would be due to fraud. Indeed, elements of Venezuela's oligarchy also reportedly lobbied receptive Western governments and political parties, asking them

not to recognise the election results if Chávez were to be re-elected. Some extreme wings of the anti-Chávez opposition even threatened violence. For many progressives in Venezuela it therefore seemed clear that the right-wing opposition had put a de-stabilisation plan in place. On election night itself inaccurate exit polls claiming Chávez had lost were circulated internationally. Spanish newspaper ABC carried an article claiming “Victory to Henrique Capriles”. The aforementioned plan seemed to be coming into operation. But the huge winning margin of 1.5 million votes undoubtedly contributed to Capriles recognising Chávez's victory on election night.

The election also witnessed ongoing intervention from the United States with state funded bodies such as USAID and National Endowment for Democracy allocating a reported US\$20 million to assist the right wing. Additionally, a barrage of media misrepresentation around the world, including here in Britain, also depicted Chávez as fighting for his political life, leading a sagging and beleaguered government. Newspapers were filled with speculation about a close race and ‘transition scenarios’.

The Economist (19/09/12), for example, claimed “Mr Chávez has disappointed enough of his countrymen to be facing the struggle of his life”. In fact, an overwhelming majority of pollsters were predicting a comfortable victory for Hugo Chávez. Yet, the continued suggestion that there was a close race was so intense that British academics issued a public call, through an open letter, for an end to the misuse of polls.

In short, the ‘Chavistas’ fought the presidential election against both the wealthiest sections of Venezuelan society and a highly powerful international coalition. Nevertheless, the wide range of social programmes, the poverty eradication policies, the sustained inclusion of millions of poor Venezuelans, free education and healthcare, income redistribution and, especially, the massive housing programme currently in full swing and which is creating strong economic growth, led to Chávez's landslide.

This strengthens social progress and democracy in Venezuela and confirms in the eyes of millions of Latin Americans that this is the way forward. Latin America as a whole has benefited from a Chávez victory in Venezuela. Chávez's triumph is every Latin American's triumph.

Viva Venezuela!

UNISON
Scotland

is delighted to send solidarity and support to VSC and the Venezuelan People

This magazine is published by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

Contributors to this issue were:

- Lee Brown
- Francisco Dominguez
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Venezuela Solidarity Campaign



Venezuelan economy grows at 5%

Venezuela's economy grew 5.2% in the third quarter of 2012 putting it well on track to achieve its annual growth target of 5% according to figures released in November.

It was the eighth consecutive quarter of economic growth since leaving a recession linked to the global crisis. A big government stimulus has underpinned growth and has been focussed on a major house-building scheme to tackle the problems of millions of Venezuelans living in shanty towns.

President Chávez said in November that there are 417,000 houses currently in construction across the country and announced increases in the housing construction target for 2013 and 2014 to 380,000 and 400,000 respectively. He added that every Venezuelan family must have a dignified home by 2019 "whatever it costs".



As a result construction has been a motor of the economic recovery, benefiting from a boost in public works that has seen over 250,000 homes built in the past 18 months.

The government budget for 2013 submitted soon after the election includes a further boost to public spending (see pages 4 and 5.). The Government expects 6% growth in 2013.

New housing in Caracas - the Government aims to build 3 million new homes by 2019

Colombia Sent Drones into Venezuela

Colombia sent spy planes into Venezuela in 2009 and 2010 and publicly lied about the intelligence activities at the time, a former Colombian defence minister has revealed.

In December 2009, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez accused Colombia of violating Venezuela's sovereignty by sending drones into Venezuelan airspace, warning "They are preparing an aggression".

At the time, the then Colombian defence minister Gabriel Silva denied Chávez's accusations, stating that "Colombia does not have the capacities they describe".

However, in November he admitted that Colombia had indeed been using drones to spy on Venezuela. "We were on the edge of war" he explained.

These military actions took place under former Colombian President Uribe who also signed an agreement in October 2009 allowing the United States access to seven of Colombia's military bases. In August this year Uribe admitted he had wanted to initiate a military operation in Venezuela but had "lacked time" as his presidency ended.

Since he was replaced by Manuel Santos, Colombian and Venezuelan diplomatic relations have normalised and Venezuela is currently playing a facilitating role in Colombia's peace talks to end its 50 year civil war.



Insert: Hugo Chavez on a 2010 march against proposed US bases in Colombia

Venezuela elected to UN Human Rights Council



Venezuela was elected as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council in November for the period 2013-2016

Venezuela received the votes of 154 countries easily surpassing the minimum of 97 votes needed to be elected. Brazil and Argentina were also elected from Latin America. Venezuela's Ambassador to the UN Jorge Valera explained that "This is a demonstration of the strength of the [Bolivarian] revolution in the world, and the successful state policies to protect the human rights of all Venezuelans without exception".

He also referred to Venezuela's human rights abuses under previous governments, contrasting it with the situation today. "We have never tortured a political opponent, nor have we made any political parties illegal. We've never violated the will of the parliament. We've never carried out a policy of forced disappearances. These [past] violations of human rights have been completely overcome."



Democracy and Social Progress - Ven

Around the world, including here in Britain, Hugo Chávez's election victory was welcomed as showing there is an alternative to the failed policies of neo-liberalism and 'austerity.'

Already in the weeks since the election the announcement of the 2013 budget shows how social progress will be further advanced, maintaining the Chávez government's commitment to using Venezuela's wealth progressively.

Between 1999 and 2012 it has spent more than \$500 billion on improving living standards. Now, the new budget is set increase public spending by a third from last year's. Social investment in health, housing, education, social security and other public services will receive 37% of the budget.

Additionally, grassroots organisations such as community councils received a boost of nearly a 50% increase over last year, representing a significant acceleration of the devolution of power.

The bulk of the remainder of the budget is being spent on infrastructure projects to further advance economic growth and social inclusion as Venezuela continues to put people first.

Here we present the views of some of those – including election monitors – inspired by Chávez's victory and Venezuela's progressive transformation.

Owen Jones

Author of *Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class* and electoral witness

"Venezuela is an inspiration to the world, it really does show that there is an alternative. I met so many people who told me how their lives had changed since the election of President Chávez: poverty halved and extreme poverty cut by two thirds."



Grahame Morris MP

Labour Friends of Venezuela

"Hugo Chávez won because of his progressive social policies which address the needs of Venezuela's poor majority. For example in the past year alone 250,000 new social houses have been built and state pensions made available for all. More widely, free healthcare and education have become a reality. Illiteracy has been eradicated to UNESCO standards; infant mortality has reduced dramatically from 20 to 13 per 1,000; unemployment has fallen from 14.5% to 7.6%, and the number of Venezuelans in extreme poverty has dropped from 24.7% to 8.5%.

It is for these reasons Chávez's vote has continually risen and that he won 8.1 million votes – a record in Venezuelan history. That's almost the same number of votes Labour won at the 2010 general election even though our electorate is two-and-a-half times bigger."

No to US Intervention!

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For Peace & Social Progress!

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Bob Crow
General Secretary

Alex Gordon
President



Venezuelans march in favour of Chavez and Social Progress

Venezuela Shows There is An Alternative

Doreen Lawrence

Social justice and anti-racist activist, speaking on her experience as an electoral witness

She called the electoral process in Venezuela "far in advance of the system used here" and dismissed allegations that Venezuela's election is anything other than free and fair, saying "hand on heart I did not see anything "irregular".



Once the results for Hugo Chávez were announced she said "people in the street were jubilant" and huge numbers "were out cheering". She explained that "Chávez is popular because of all the work that he does for the communities".

Len McCluskey

General Secretary of Unite the Union

"Unite congratulates the Venezuelan people on holding another free and fair election. Once again Venezuela has shown why former US president Jimmy Carter has said it has the best election process in the world."

"We welcome this result which is a clear endorsement of Hugo Chávez's progressive social policies. Venezuela shows that governments that put the needs of ordinary working people first can expect strong support at the ballot box. Rather than making ordinary people bear the brunt of an economic crisis, governments in Europe might want to learn the obvious lessons from Venezuela."



Diane Abbott MP

Britain's first Black woman MP and election monitor in October

"Far from opposition media being suppressed, virtually every leading paper supported Chávez's opponent. Along with other election observers, I spoke to representatives of the opposition party at every polling station we visited. They agreed the system was indeed free and fair. Western critics of Chávez often forget his substantial achievements for the poor of Venezuela".



Andy Slaughter MP

Labour MP for Hammersmith and Shadow Minister for Justice

"This is a great result for the people of Venezuela, progressive politics and the democratic process."



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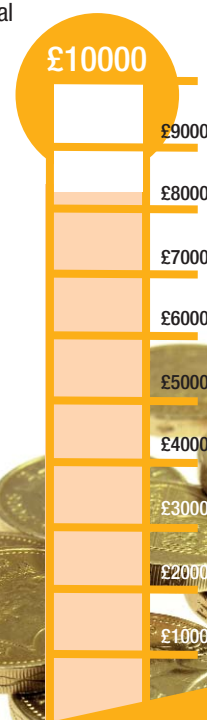
FINANCIAL APPEAL RAISES OVER £8000

PLEASE DONATE TODAY SO WE CAN MAKE OUR £10,000 TARGET!

In the Spring, VSC launched a special appeal with the aim of raising £10,000 to fund a crucial expansion of our work around the Presidential election in Venezuela.

This magazine outlines some of our initiatives to build support for Venezuela in recent months.

At the time of going to press, we have reached **£8200** for this appeal – please donate today to help us meeting our target. You can donate online at www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk or by sending a cheque made out in the name of 'Venezuela Solidarity Campaign' to: VSC, PO Box 56210, London, N4 4XH



Media bias clear during

Pre-election coverage: Chávez to lose

Media coverage of Venezuela in Britain appeared to reach a new low with the reporting of the Presidential election. Acres of pre-election coverage suggested that Hugo Chávez was set to lose, despite the overwhelming majority of polling evidence showing the contrary. Even after the landslide win some continued to give the impression that it was close.

A few headlines alone are enough to show the false media narrative built up. One of the most misleading headlines was *The Independent's* claim two days before the vote that "Hugo Chávez finally meets his match" – it also carried the sub-headline that he "may be about to lose power in Sunday's vote" (5 October).

Other examples included; a front-page headline of the *Guardian's* G2 magazine "Hugo Chávez: a strongman's last stand" (Rory Carroll, 2 October); "Talk your way out of this, Presidente" (*Sunday Times*, 7 October); "Venezuela presidential vote looks set for close finish" (*Reuters*, 7 October); "Is Hugo Chávez about to lose power? Venezuela goes to the polls in closely fought election" (*Associated Press*); and "Venezuelan elections see Hugo Chávez's rule under threat" (*Metro*, 7 October). The *Metro* article even explained

that "Chávez may be toppled by Mr Capriles, who is edging closer... according to final polls" after having run a "barnstorming campaign" against Chávez's apparent "lacklustre campaign" despite Chávez hosting Venezuela's largest ever rally! This argument was taken to its logical conclusion - in its early print edition the day after the election the *Metro* actually claimed Chávez "was reportedly behind Henrique Capriles in the election race".

In an election day article the *Guardian's* Latin American correspondent claimed, despite the polling evidence (which the article itself had referred to) that "there was a genuine chance of an upset."

All these headlines and comments were written despite the overwhelming evidence that Chávez would be comfortably re-elected. It was not a case of rogue polls but of the media's failure to

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Billy Hayes General Secretary Jane Loftus President

Venezuelan election

reflect the reality in Venezuela, seeing events through a prism of Venezuela's wealthy elite who ran the country for decades.

Indeed, the continued disregard of most of the polls by the British media and their cherry picking of the odd poll that suggested a Chávez defeat prompted a dozen British based academics to write an open letter calling on the media to report the evidence.



Post election coverage: close race

Despite Hugo Chávez having won by a landslide 11%, the post election impression given in much of the media was that it was close.

Headlines indicating Chávez had just scraped through included; "...Chávez Survives Scare To Extend Rule" (*Independent*, 9 October); "Hugo Chávez Sees Off Stiff Competition..." (*Metro*, 8 October); "Goliath Wins, But Venezuela is at a Turning Point" (*FT*, 9 October).

The *BBC* correspondent described the winning margin as "just 10 points". The *Associated Press* the day after the election wrote that Chávez won after "surviving his closest race yet" and *Reuters* said it was "considerably slimmer" than 2006" (8 October).

Perhaps the worst headline was *The Guardian's* front-page headline accompanying a huge photo of Chávez that claimed "Tanks and

AK47-Wielding Soldiers in the Street as Chávez Holds Onto Power in Venezuela" on the day after the election – which would clearly undermine Chávez's huge electoral mandate in the eyes of readers by giving the false impression the result was achieved in an intimidating atmosphere.

Given that so many parts of the media got it so badly wrong on Venezuela's most significant election, surely it is time they re-assessed the reporting of their correspondents in Latin America, re-examined who they are discussing events with, and gave greater weight to the voices of Venezuela's majority, once excluded but now driving events in the country?



Congratulations to Hugo Chávez and the Venezuelan people on a spectacular victory

Len McCluskey, General Secretary
Tony Woodhouse, Chair of GEC

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¡viva venezuela!

Strongest Ever Support Shown for Venezuela in Britain!

In a statement published as a letter in the *Independent on Sunday*, over 200 prominent people from across society called on the British government to respect the results of the Venezuelan Presidential election.

Some 60 British parliamentarians from six parties & a range of figures from across civil society backed the statement. Prominent academics supporters included Professor Ernesto Laclau & Professor

Doreen Massey; 16 trade union General Secretaries including TUC General Secretary (Designate) Frances O'Grady; human rights campaigners included lawyers Anthony Gifford QC & Imran Khan, plus many others including veteran

peace campaigner Tony Benn & Ken Livingstone, former Mayor of London, and from the world of culture, poet Benjamin Zephaniah, & musicians Drew McConnell (of the band Babyshambles) & Jon McClure (Reverend & the Makers.)



Frances O'Grady

Rally for Venezuela!

VSC's Rally for Venezuela in September showed the growing support there is for the right of the Venezuelan people to determine their own future, with some 350 people packing the event out!

A particularly warm welcome was reserved for Venezuelan Ambassador Samuel Moncada, one of over 20 speakers. The event was covered by the Telesur Latin American TV channel amongst others and received much attention within Venezuela. TUC General Secretary (Designate) Frances O'Grady opened the first panel with an inspiring and rallying call for support, arguing "I am here to defend Venezuelans rights to choose their own President - and not have it forced on them from outside."

A number of members of parliament also addressed the event, with Diane Abbott MP



saying, "Venezuela shows you can use a country's resources for the people of that country, not for multinational corporations." The event also heard from a number of international guests, including from France, Ireland, Ecuador, Cuba, Nicaragua and Argentina.

Fiesta Celebrates Chávez's Victory!

Over 300 people attended a special fiesta at Bolivar Hall on the 19th of October to celebrate President Chávez's stunning election victory.



Jeremy Corbyn MP & Ambassador Samuel Moncada raise a toast

Special guests included the Venezuelan Ambassador, Samuel Moncada, the Cuban Ambassador, Esther Amenteros, Jeremy Corbyn MP, and the writer and activist Owen Jones, who spoke of President Chávez's unprecedented popularity after 13 years in government. "In the run up to the election, President Chávez received approval ratings of over 60% and there was an 81% turnout for the vote, which is a mandate the UK government could only dream of."

Guests were treated to live music by Jesus Cutiño and his band, who are residents at London's Ronnie Scotts, hip hop performers Zona Protesta, and the latest Latin sounds by DJ ALX Alfaro.

■ VSC would like to thank Thompsons Solicitors, BFAWU, the FBU, GFTU, NUT, RMT TSSA, UCATT, UCU and UNITE for their support with these events and initiatives.

Join the VSC

■ If you join VSC online at: www.venezuelasolidarity.co.uk for only £18 you receive a free DVD of Oliver Stone's *South of the Border*. You can also join by cheque for £18 (£9 unwaged) to Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, c/o PO Box 56210, London N4 4XH

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